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# Spotlight on the Australian labour market over the last 30 years

Exploring changes in the Australian labour market between September quarter 1994 and September quarter 2024 using Labour Account data

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**Source:** [Labour Account Australia, September 2024](#)

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## Overview

With today's release of the Labour Account, the time series now contains 30 years of data, providing a comprehensive view of the Australian labour market from September quarter 1994 to September quarter 2024 (referred to as September going forward).

This article provides a series of summary snapshots exploring changes in the Australian labour market over the past 30 years using data from various Labour Account quadrants (Jobs, People and Hours).

All data are seasonally adjusted, unless stated otherwise.

## About the Labour Account

The Labour Account provides an overall picture of the labour market by bringing together various sources into a single set of data to create a coherent and internally consistent set of high-quality labour market estimates. It is a rich source of data that can be used to better understand how the Australian labour market has evolved and changed over time. The Labour Account is our best source of quarterly industry and sector employment data; for more information please refer to [Spotlight on the Labour Account \(/articles/spotlight-labour-account\)](#).

## Employed people

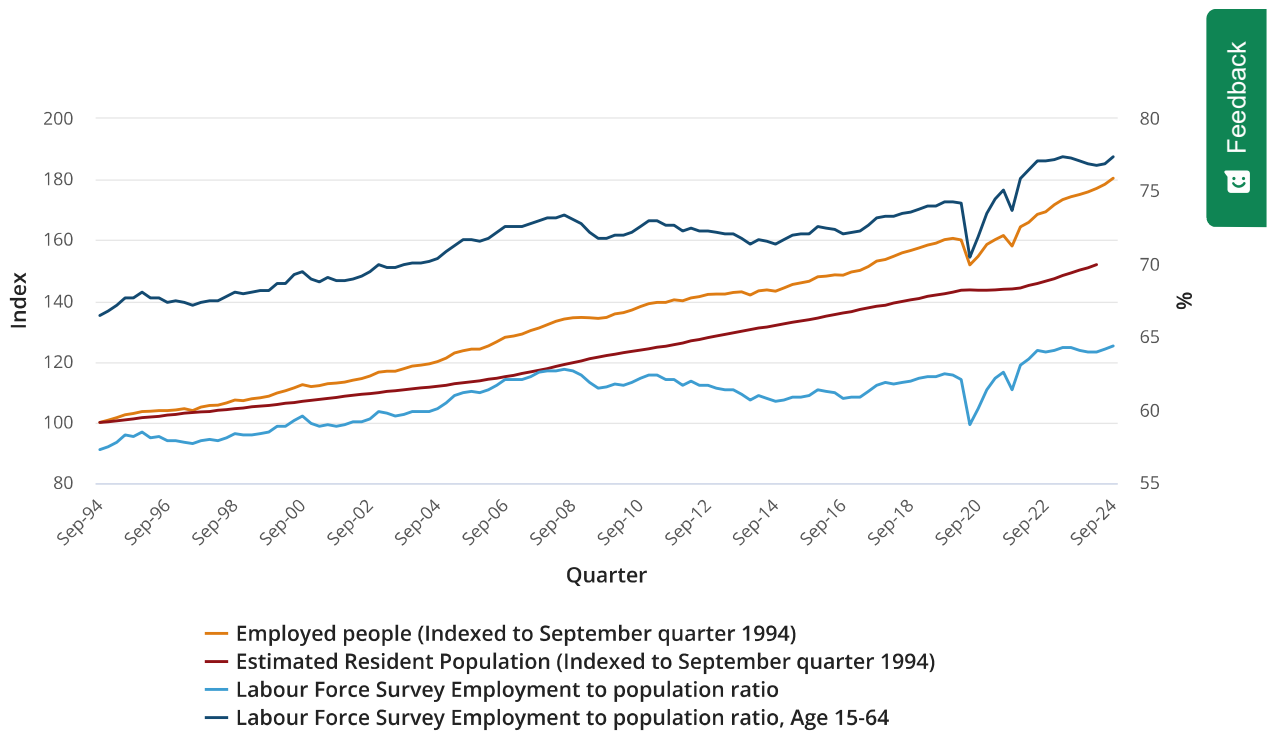
The total number of employed people in Australia increased by 80.4 per cent over the past 30 years, from 8.2 million in September 1994 to 14.8 million people in September 2024. Growth in employed persons has outpaced growth in Australia's population, with the Australian population having increased 51.9 per cent between September 1994 and [March 2024 \(/statistics/people/population/national-state-and-territory-population/mar-2024\)](#).

The employment to population ratio, measured through the [Labour Force Survey \(/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-australia/oct-2024\)](#), has also grown over time, from 57.3 per cent in September 1994 to 64.4 per cent in September 2024. For people aged from 15 to 64 years, this ratio has also increased over the same period, but at a slightly stronger pace in recent years.

Average quarterly growth in employed persons since September 1994 has been 0.5 per cent; the largest decline was seen in June 2020 (5.2 per cent) which coincided with the introduction of a number of COVID-19 related restrictions. Conversely, the largest increase was recorded in December 2021 (4.0 per cent) when COVID-19 restrictions related to the Delta variant eased.

The latest [Estimated Resident Population data \(/statistics/people/population/national-state-and-territory-population/mar-2024\)](#) indicates Australia's population grew by 5.2% between December 2021 and March 2024. Employment rose at a faster rate, 7.7%, over the same period.

Figure 1: Employed people vs Australian population



Estimated Resident Population in Original terms.

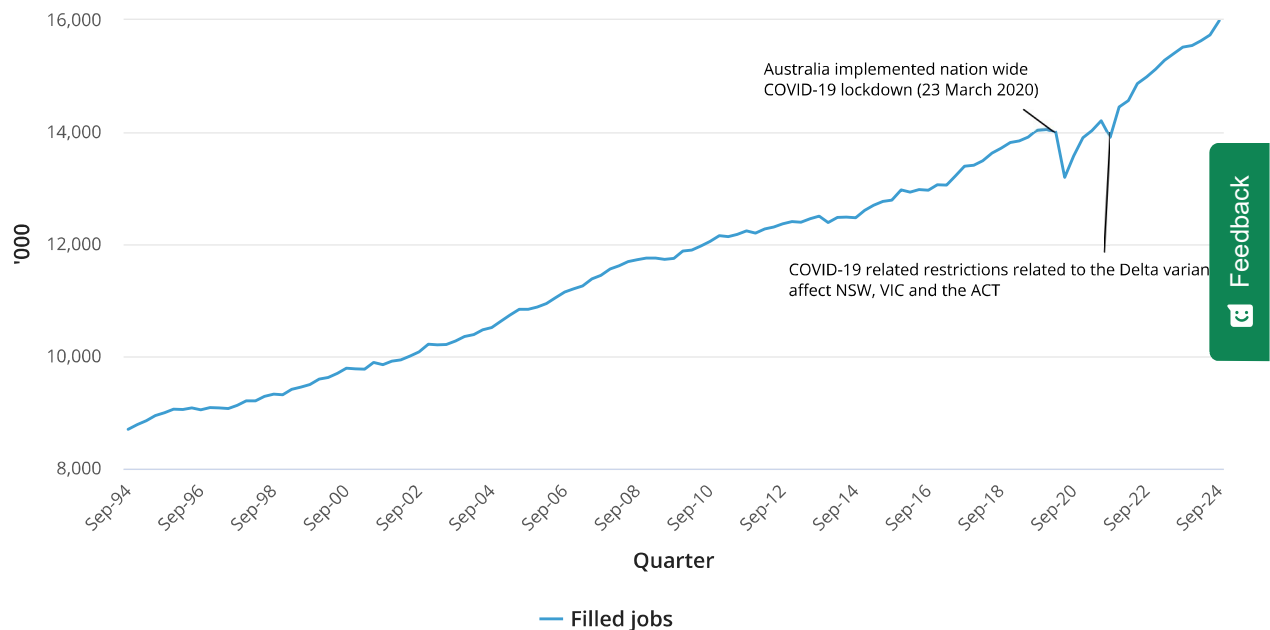
Additional sources: [National, state and territory population, March 2024 \(https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/population/national-state-and-territory-population/mar-2024\)](#) and [Labour Force Survey, October 2024 \(https://author.absweb.aws.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-australia/oct-2024\)](#).

## Filled jobs

The number of filled jobs (jobs with an employed person in them) in Australia increased by 7.3 million jobs (83.9 per cent) over the past 30 years – from 8.7 million jobs in September 1994 to 16 million jobs in September 2024. Average quarterly change in filled jobs between 1994 and 2019, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, was 0.5 per cent. June 2020 saw the largest drop in filled jobs, with a fall of 812,000 jobs (5.8 per cent) as people and businesses were impacted by COVID-19 related restrictions.

Since December quarter 2021, the average quarterly change in filled jobs has been 0.9 per cent. There were 1.5 million more filled jobs in September 2024 compared to December 2021. Growth in secondary jobs (17.7 per cent) has outpaced the growth in main jobs (10.2 per cent) over this period; there were 1.4 million more main jobs and 0.2 million more secondary jobs.

Figure 2: Filled jobs, Australia



## Filled jobs by industry share

Over the past 30 years the Australian economy has undergone a significant structural change, with growth in service based industries outpacing growth in goods based industries.

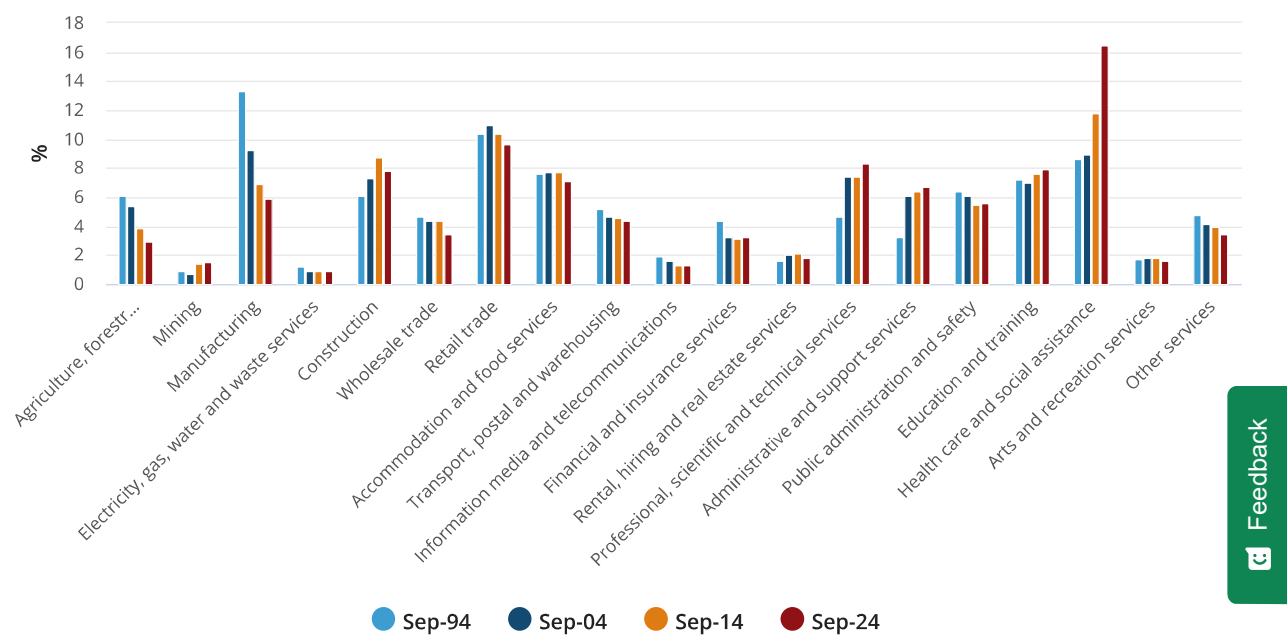
Goods based industries include Agriculture, forestry and fishing, Mining, Manufacturing, Electricity, gas, water and waste services, Construction, Wholesale trade, Retail trade, and Transport, postal and warehousing. The remainder are categorised as service based industries.

This shift is reflected in filled jobs by industry share, with service industries making up 52.2 per cent of filled jobs in September 1994, increasing to 63.5 per cent in September 2024.

Over the last 30 years, the Manufacturing industry had the largest proportional fall in filled jobs, with its industry share falling from 13.3 per cent in September 1994 to 5.9 per cent in September 2024.

The Health care and social assistance industry recorded the largest increase in filled jobs over the past 30 years, with the share of filled jobs in this industry increasing from 8.6 per cent in September 1994 to 16.5 per cent in September 2024. This increase has been particularly pronounced over the past 10 years driven, in part, by an ageing Australian population and higher demand for childcare and disability services, including the introduction of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) in 2013.

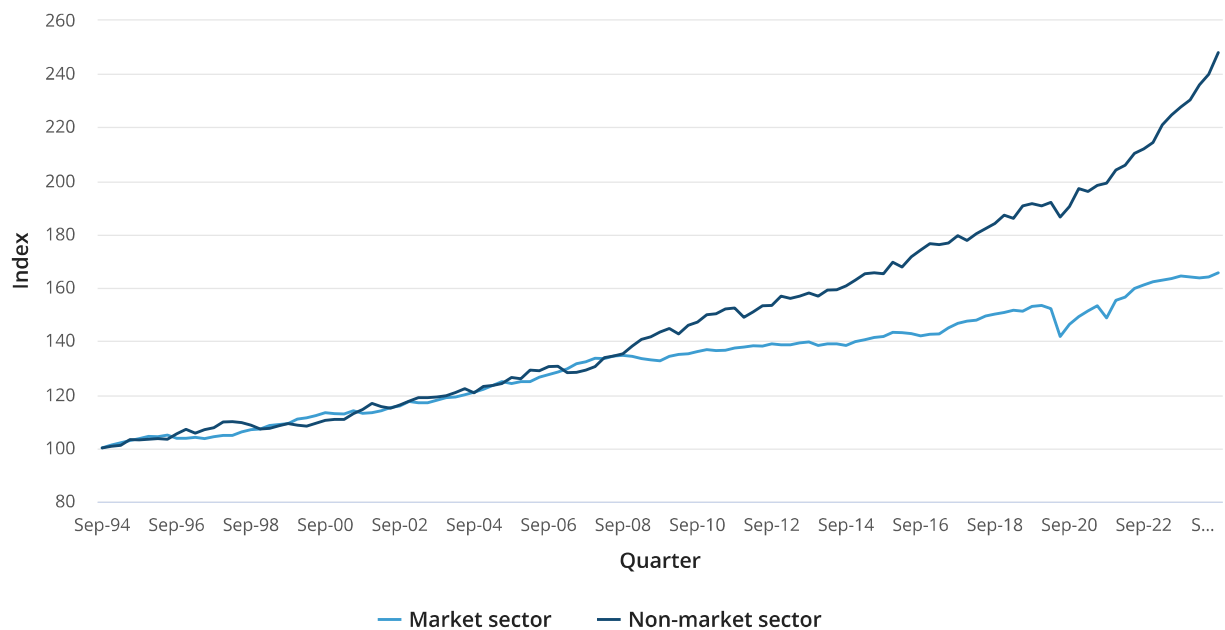
Figure 3: Share of filled jobs by industry



### Market and non-market sector

The categorisation of industries into the [market and non-market sector \(/statistics/detailed-methodology-information/concepts-sources-methods/australian-system-national-accounts-concepts-sources-and-methods/2020-21/chapter-19-productivity-measures/data-sources-and-methods\)](#) allows for a detailed analysis of the labour market, based on whether output is sold at economically significant prices. The ABS assigns ANZSIC industry classifications to either the market or non-market sector based on how the majority of output in each industry is disposed. The non-market sector is comprised of Health care and social assistance, Education and training, and Public administration and safety, while the market sector is comprised of the remaining industries.

Figure 4: Filled jobs for market and non-market sector, indexed to September 1994

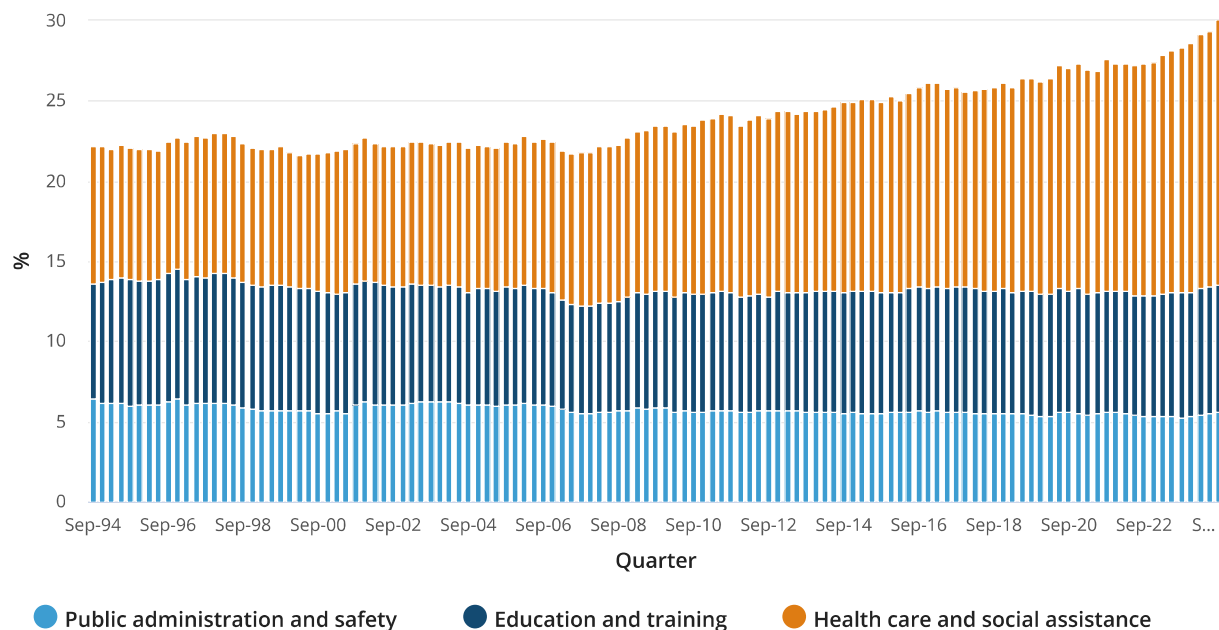


The number of filled jobs in market and non-market sectors grew at similar rates between 1994 and 2008. Since September 2008, filled jobs in non-market sector industries have grown at a faster rate compared to market sector industries (83.3 per cent for non-market compared with 22.9 per cent for market), with Health care and social assistance driving this growth underpinned by increased demand for essential services.

Between September 2008 and September 2024, filled jobs in Health care and social assistance increased by 1.5 million (or 129 per cent), Education and training increased by 461,000 (or 57.8 per cent) and Public administration and safety increased by 228,000 (or 34.4 per cent).

Over this same period, the proportion of total filled jobs in the non-market sector has increased from 22.2 per cent in September 2008, to 24.9 per cent in September 2014 and 29.9 per cent in September 2024.

**Figure 5: Proportion of total filled jobs in non-market sector industries**



In addition to the market and non-market groupings of industries, the Labour Account includes public and private sector filled jobs data from September 2010 onwards. It is the ABS' best source for quarterly public and private sector jobs data.

Between September 2010 and September 2024, filled jobs in the private sector grew by 3.3 million jobs (or 32.7 per cent), while public sector filled jobs increased by 570,000 (or 31.0 per cent).

In September 2024, the proportion of total filled jobs in the private sector was 84.9 per cent, which was close to the 85 per cent recorded in September 2014.

While around 90 per cent of public sector jobs are in the non-market sector industries, it is important to remember that there is also a large number of private sector jobs in those industries. For example, around 75.1 per cent of filled jobs in Health care and social assistance in September 2024 were in the private sector.

## Selected industry analysis

Health care and social assistance, Construction, and Manufacturing are explored further below as each industry offers different and unique insights into the Australian labour market over the past 30 years.

This section draws on Labour Account industry subdivision data, available quarterly through [Data Explorer \(/statistics/labour/labour-accounts/labour-account-australia/sep-2024#subdivison-datasets\)](https://statistics.labour/labour-accounts/labour-account-australia/sep-2024#subdivison-datasets) in original terms, to provide further information about underlying changes.

As data at the industry subdivision level is only available in original terms, all data in this section (for both division and subdivision) are in original terms.

Similar analysis can be done with Labour Account data for the other 16 industries, and the industry subdivisions within them.

## Health Care and Social Assistance

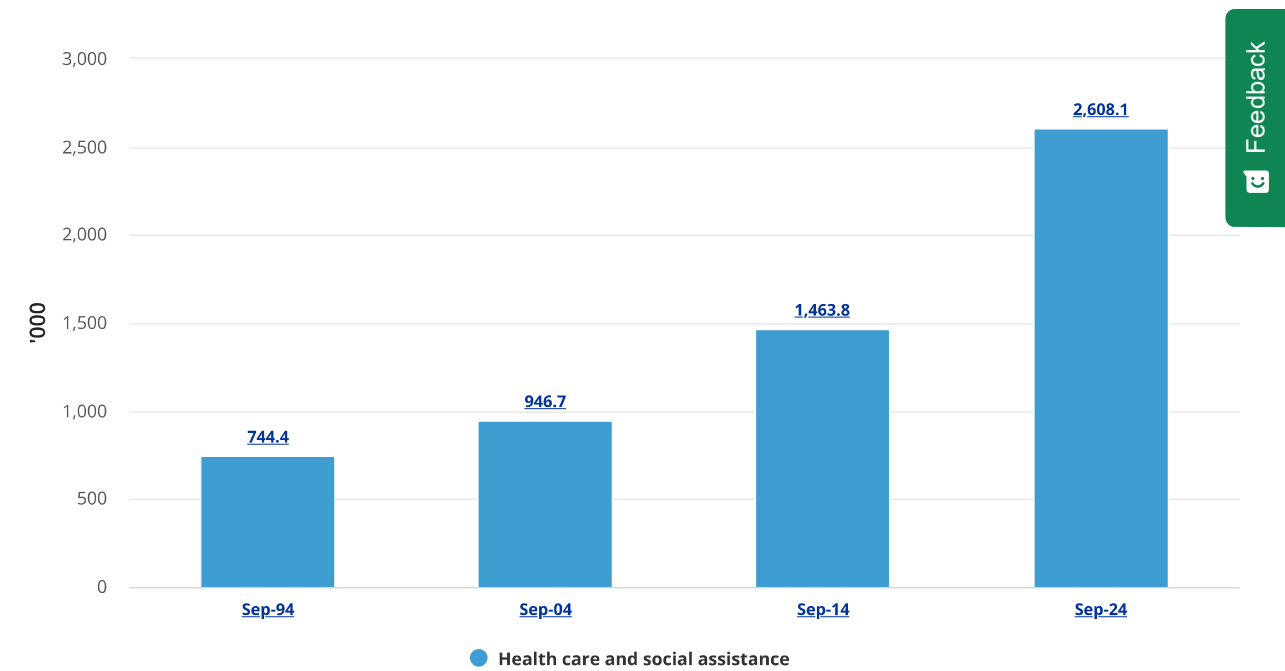
In September 1994, Health care and social assistance was the third largest employing industry in Australia with 744,000 filled jobs, representing 8.5 per cent of total filled jobs.

By September 2024, the number of filled jobs in Health care and social assistance had increased by 1.9 million filled jobs to 2.6 million. It now represents 16.4 per cent of total filled jobs and is the largest employing industry in Australia.

By subdivision, Social assistance services recorded the largest growth between September 1994 and September 2024, gaining 662,000 filled jobs (508 per cent). This subdivision captures activities including childcare services, disability assistance services and aged care assistance services. Growth in this subdivision has been influenced by the ageing Australian population and the rollout of the NDIS, as well as the rise in demand for childcare in recent years with higher labour force participation.

The remaining three subdivisions gained 1.2 million filled jobs over this period, with growth ranging from 177 per cent for Hospitals to 219 per cent for Medical and other health care services.

Figure 6: Filled jobs in Health care and social assistance



Data is in Original terms.

## Construction

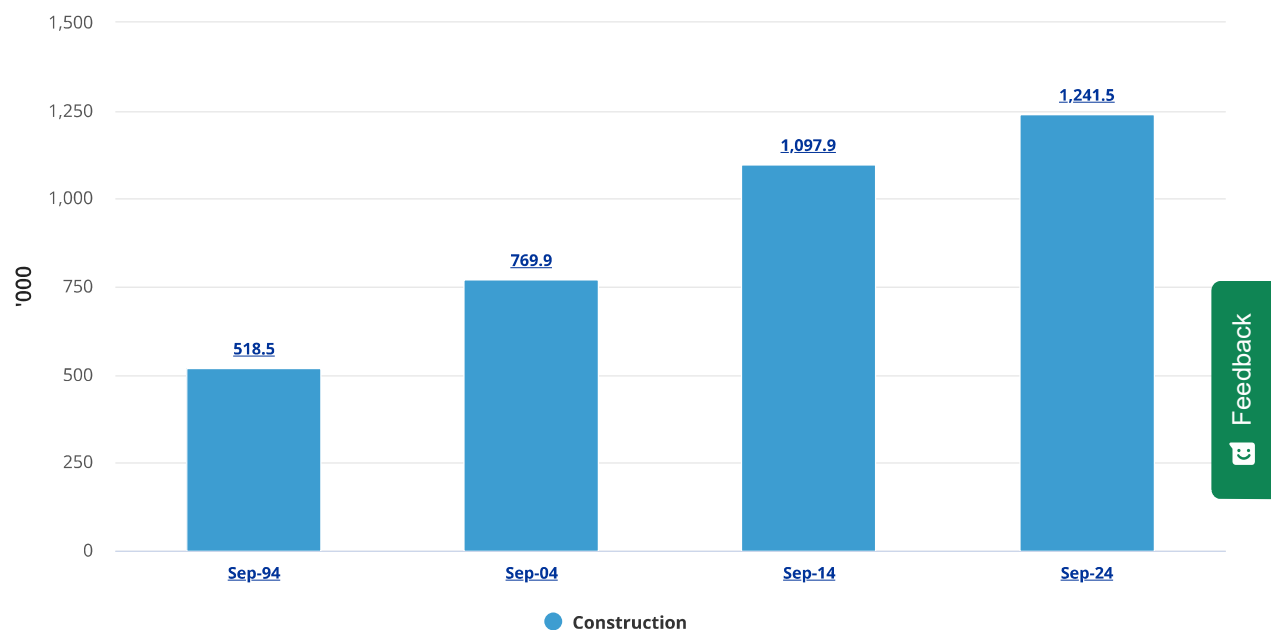
In September 1994, Construction was the eighth largest employing industry in Australia with 519,000 filled jobs, representing 5.9 per cent of all filled jobs.

By September 2024, Construction had increased by 723,000 filled jobs to 1.2 million, representing 7.8 per cent of filled jobs. It is currently the fifth largest employing industry in Australia.

In September 1994, there were 95,000 filled jobs in Building construction (18.2 per cent of all construction jobs), 65,000 filled jobs in Heavy and civil engineering construction (12.4 per cent of all construction jobs) and 359,000 filled jobs in Construction services (69.3 per cent of all construction jobs).

The Building construction subdivision has seen the largest growth in filled jobs since September 1994, having increased 169 per cent to 254,000 filled jobs in September 2024. As of September 2024, Building construction comprises 20.5 per cent of Construction industry jobs. Activities in this subdivision includes residential construction, such as houses and apartments, and non-residential construction such as hospitals and schools.

Figure 7: Filled jobs in Construction



Data is in Original terms.

Manufacturing

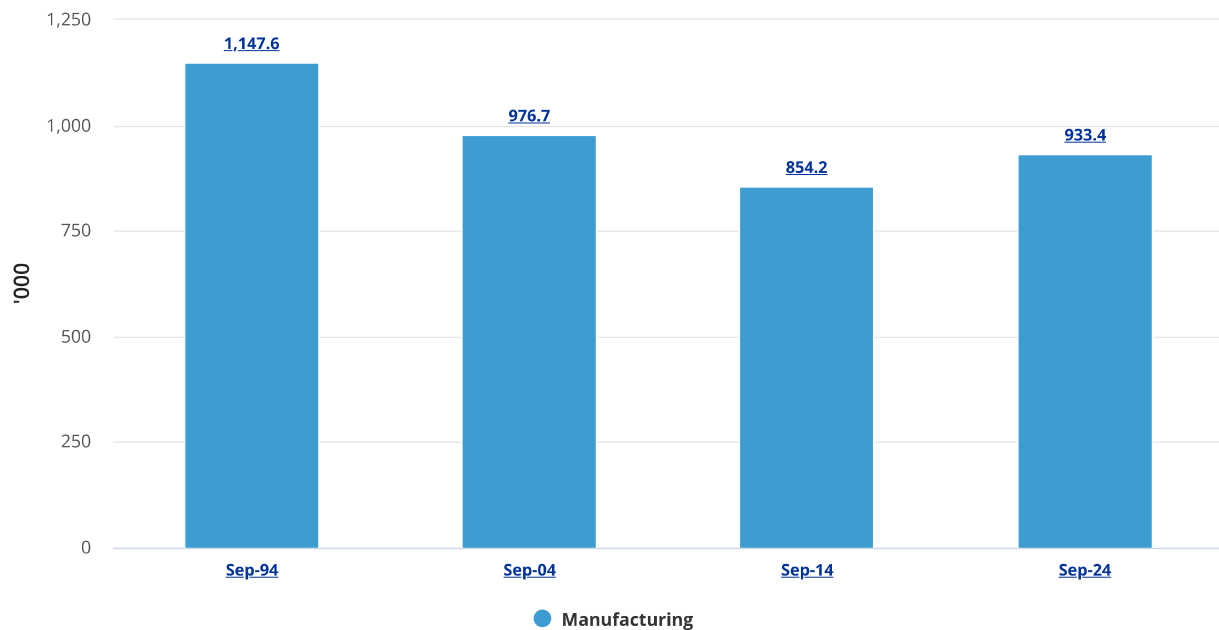
In September 1994, Manufacturing was the largest employing industry in Australia with 1.1 million filled jobs, representing 13.2 per cent of all filled jobs. By September 2024, the level of filled jobs had decreased by 18.7 per cent (214,000 filled jobs) to 933,000. It is now the eighth largest employing industry in Australia.

While there has been a decline in filled jobs in Manufacturing over the last 30 years, there has been some filled jobs growth over the last 10 years, with filled jobs having increased between September 2014 and September 2024.

12 of the 15 subdivisions in Manufacturing recorded falls in filled jobs between September 1994 and September 2024. Printing (including the reproduction of recorded media) recorded the largest fall in the number of filled jobs, down by 34,000 (or 57.7 per cent). The introduction of new technologies, increased global competition and a rise in digital media have influenced this fall.

Figure 8: Filled jobs in Manufacturing





Data is in Original terms.



## Secondary jobs

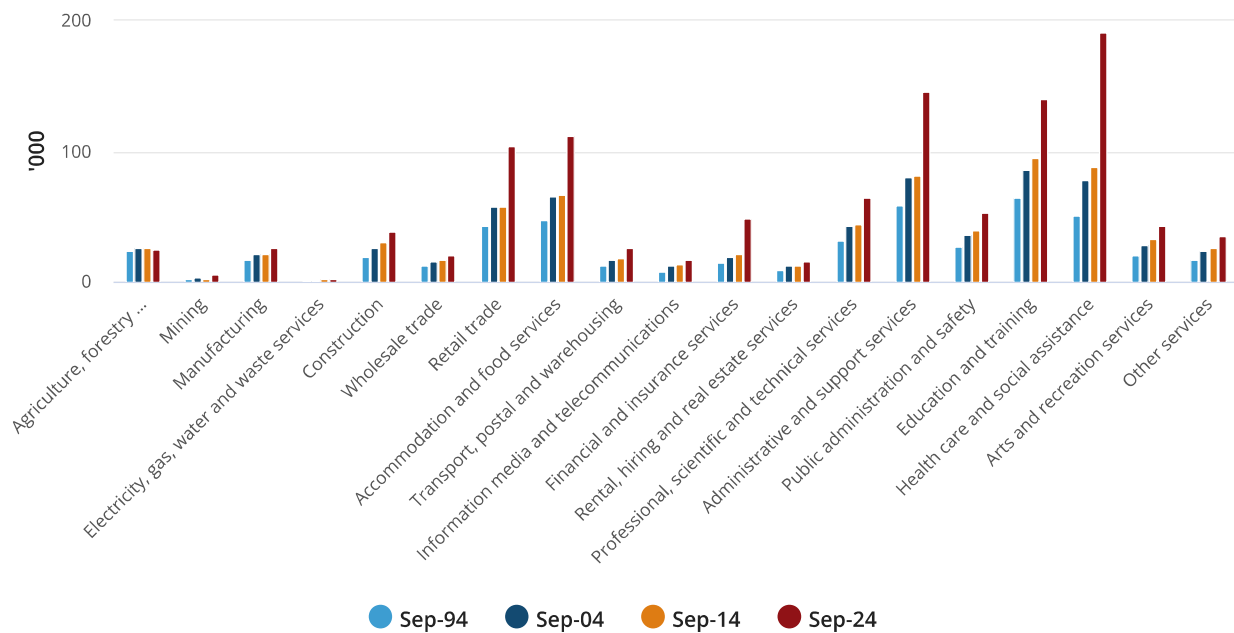
A secondary job is any job held by an employed person, other than their main job. A person may hold more than one secondary job. In Australia, secondary jobs increased by 131 per cent (631,000 jobs) over the last 30 years – from 480,000 in September 1994 to 1.1 million in September 2024. Growth in secondary jobs has outpaced growth in main jobs over the same period (131 per cent, compared to 81.1 per cent).

Strong growth in secondary jobs has led to an increase in the rate of multiple job-holders over the past 30 years (the number of people with more than one job). This is explored in further detail in [Multiple job-holders \(/statistics/labour/jobs/multiple-job-holders/sep-2024\)](https://author.absweb.aws.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/jobs/multiple-job-holders/sep-2024).

Health care and social assistance experienced the largest increase in secondary jobs, rising from 51,000 in September 1994, to 191,000 in September 2024.

Administration and support services has also seen strong growth in secondary jobs, particularly in the past 10 years, as use of labour supply services have increased. This is explored further in [Labour hire workers \(https://author.absweb.aws.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/earnings-and-working-conditions/labour-hire-workers/latest-release\)](https://author.absweb.aws.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/earnings-and-working-conditions/labour-hire-workers/latest-release).

Figure 9: Secondary jobs, by industry



## Hours worked

Hours worked increased by 2.4 billion hours (65.6 per cent) – from 3.6 billion hours in September 1994 to 5.9 billion hours in September 2024. However, average hours worked per employed person fell 8.2 per cent between September 1994 and September 2024, reflecting a changing labour market landscape; including a greater share of people working part time and more flexible workplace conditions, as well as advancements in technology.

As seen in the [Labour Force Survey \(/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-australia/oct-2024\)](#), 24.0 per cent of employed people worked part-time in September 1994 compared to 31.0 per cent in September 2024.

**Figure 10: Average hours worked per employed person, indexed to September quarter 1994**



## Industry level changes

Health care and social assistance recorded the largest increase in hours worked between September 1994 and September 2024 (607.4 million hours, or 231 per cent), broadly in line with the increase in filled jobs (254 per cent). This growth has accelerated in the last 10 years, with hours worked increasing by 73.7 per cent between September 2014 and September 2024. Average hours worked per job fell by 6.6 per cent between September 1994 and September 2024.

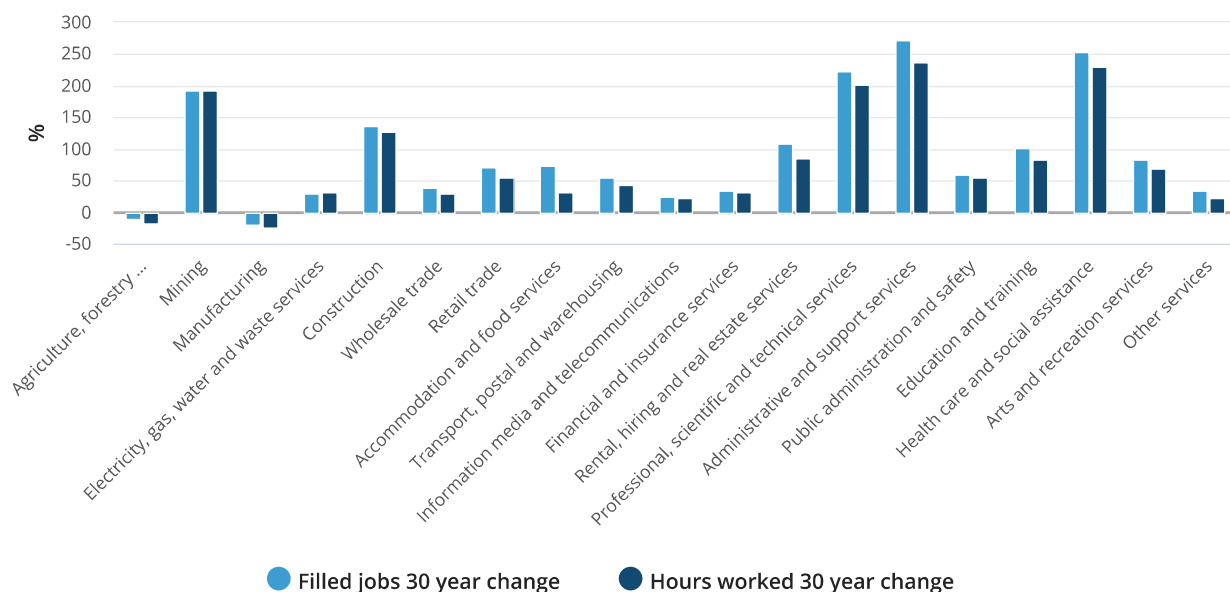
Administration and support services also recorded a strong increase in hours worked between September 1994 and September 2024 (228.2 million hours, or 238 per cent), with increased demand for administrative and recruitment services. However, filled jobs growth in this industry over the past 30 years has been stronger at 273 per cent, resulting in the average hours worked per job falling 9.4 per cent.

Two industries have seen falls in hours worked since September 1994 – Agriculture, forestry and fishing and Manufacturing.

Hours worked in Agriculture, forestry and fishing have declined between September 1994 and September 2024 (45.1 million hours, or 17.6 per cent), with average hours worked also falling 7.8 per cent. This has been driven by environmental factors, such as drought, automation, and a changing regulatory landscape, such as logging bans and commercial fishing quotas.

Manufacturing has seen a decrease in hours worked, down 24.3 per cent (127.7 million hours), with average hours worked per job also falling 6.6 per cent. This has been driven primarily by accelerated global competition and increased imports.

**Figure 11: Change in hours worked and filled jobs between September quarter 1994 and September quarter 2024**



## More information

The Labour Account enables detailed labour market and macroeconomic analysis over a 30-year period, supporting a better understanding of how the Australian labour market has changed over time. It is our most comprehensive source of labour market data and the best source of analysing industry and sector employment over time.

For more information about the Labour Account and other labour statistics, please see:

- [Spotlight on the Labour Account \(https://www.abs.gov.au/articles/spotlight-labour-account\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/articles/spotlight-labour-account): Provides an overview of the Labour Account, its benefits and how it can be used to draw unique labour market insights.
- [Labour Account methodology: \(https://author.absweb.aws.abs.gov.au/methodologies/labour-account-australia-methodology/sep-2024\)](https://author.absweb.aws.abs.gov.au/methodologies/labour-account-australia-methodology/sep-2024) Provides information on the conceptual framework, data sources, outputs and measurement error.
- [Guide to labour statistics: \(/statistics/understanding-statistics/guide-labour-statistics\)](/statistics/understanding-statistics/guide-labour-statistics) Provides summary information on a range of labour market measures available from the ABS.
- [Labour Statistics: Concepts, Sources and Methods: \(/statistics/detailed-methodology-information/concepts-sources-methods/labour-statistics-concepts-sources-and-methods/latest-release\)](/statistics/detailed-methodology-information/concepts-sources-methods/labour-statistics-concepts-sources-and-methods/latest-release) Contains a comprehensive description of the concepts and definitions underpinning labour statistics and the data sources and methods used to compile them.
- [Labour statistics recent and upcoming developments \(/statistics/understanding-statistics/guide-labour-statistics/labour-statistics-recent-and-upcoming-developments\)](/statistics/understanding-statistics/guide-labour-statistics/labour-statistics-recent-and-upcoming-developments): Contains an overview of recent and upcoming developments in ABS labour statistics.

